



AT THE HELM

Wendy White, founder and CEO

PERFORMANCE

Revenues were in the \$10 million range

HIGHLIGHTS

New clients included ViroPharma (now Shire), Communispace, Aegerion, Vidara and Incyte

Digital AOR assignments from Recordati and GSK

Working with pharma companies to help them set up rare-disease units

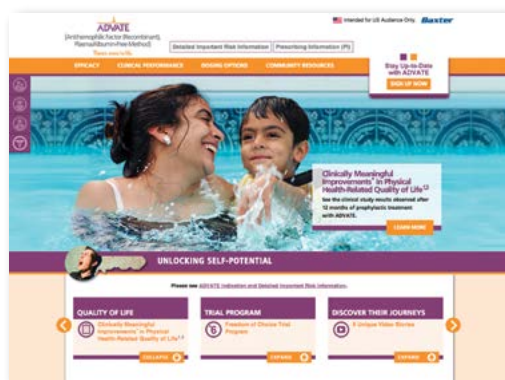
CHALLENGES

Lost work on Kynamro due to Sanofi's acquisition of Genzyme

For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 183

Siren Interactive

Chicago firm broadens its base beyond a rare-disease specialty



Siren worked on the website for Advate, a hemophilia A medication from Baxter Pharmaceuticals

Siren Interactive made both a geographic and a cultural shift when its office moved last August, heading from Chicago's suburban Oak Park to the city's West Loop, a much more hip area that's attracting a lot of tech companies. Orbitz and Groupon are neighbors, and Google is moving into the neighborhood this year.

"West Loop is a tech hotbed," Siren's founder and CEO Wendy White says of her new neighborhood. "It's much easier to recruit being among other tech companies and other agencies—people are coming to us. We have a much bigger office space, and we're anticipating growth."

Though rare diseases have always been the main order of business at Siren (White's daughter has a rare disease), the agency has broadened its offerings and client base in the rare disease category over the last several years.

"When we started we were doing a lot of digital tactics, and we'd come up against other digital firms,"

White says about the agency's transformation. "In the last couple of years we really honed in on patient engagement, advocacy and adding high-touch components and more direct community engagement. That required different skill sets and a re-adjustment of talent and how we approach the work."

Revenue was "pretty flat" last year (in the \$5 million to \$10 million range), and headcount was down two to 34.

Suzanne Tsuchiya joined Siren from Abelson Taylor as VP of account services. Doug Strubel, the agency's former VP of operations, was promoted to chief financial officer.

This year White (who was formerly president) became chief executive officer, promoting Tsuchiya to president.

"Given our leadership position in the rare disease space, I'm traveling a lot, and I'm president elect for the Healthcare Businesswomen's Association," White says. "Suzanne has the office running like a Swiss clock, and I'm not trying to do two jobs."

Seven new clients were added to the Siren roster in 2013. They included ViroPharma (now Shire), Communispace, Aegerion, Vidara and Incyte. Assignments from these five covered a lot of ground, including digital work, strategy work, patient recruitment, patient support work and community engagement work.

Digital AOR assignments were won on Recordati's Panhematin (acute intermittent porphyria) and on GSK's drisapersen (Duchenne muscular dystrophy). The latter was a huge win, but the product failed its Phase-III clinical trial.

Sanofi's acquisition of Genzyme claimed work on Kynamro.

Last year a number of unnamed top 10 pharma companies began asking Siren for high-level strategy help in setting up rare disease units.

"We've done it for three big pharma companies now," White says. "These bigger companies are used to working in silos. We [advised them that they] have to think differently about how they operate if they're going to work in this smaller, interconnected rare disease space."

Figuring out how to use social media is key for almost all healthcare companies, and White says that it's particularly important when it comes to orphan drug launches.

"We think a lot about how to deal with issues like compassionate use or pricing within social media," she explains. "These are small communities, and voices can get very loud. Silence isn't safe for pharma companies in social media. They have to tell their story because in the absence of a story, people will make up intentions that may not be true."

This year has been shaping up rather nicely. The agency is pitching, and White is speaking a lot. She's also busy helping put together "hackathons," including one that was held in May at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to develop an app that will shorten rare disease diagnosis time. —Tanya Lewis

"Silence isn't safe for pharma companies in social media"

—Wendy White